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Letter to the Editor
The New York Times
229 West 43rd Street
New York, New York 10036

To the Editor:

First, I would like to express my appreciation to the New York Times for publishing an article of mine (July 8, 1984), in addition to an excellent editorial that same week.

It is therefore with sadness and reluctance that I write this letter, which is not intended for publication, but which I hope the editors will ponder. Because, no matter how sad or reluctant I may feel in writing this, I am keenly aware of my responsibility as an East Timorese churchman to speak my mind. For most of the clergy in East Timor does not have this luxury, living as they do with the ever-present coercion enforced by the Indonesian military.

My comments concern two articles ("War goes on in Indonesian Isle", July 19; and "Western Timor's problem: too many problems", August 30).

First, let me repeat what I wrote in my July 8 article last year: "Jakarta has tried to hide the truth by isolating East Timor from normal contact with the outside world." The words "normal contact" have special significance: visits of a few days' duration are not "normal contact" but are highly controlled situations, arranged well in advance and designed to deceive, similar to the "Potemkin villages" in old Russia.

Under these circumstances -- and as my successor as head of East Timor's Catholic Church, Mgr. Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo, has recently confirmed, these <u>are</u> the actual circumstances of such visits, despite what Jakarta's defenders may say -- visitors are given a highly selective view of conditions in East Timor and of the feelings of the East Timorese people.

Moreover, it is a well-known fact that few people in East Timor are able to speak openly about their actual situation -- and that people in this position are in places that one might not suspect. From long experience I know that many East Timorese working in the administration set up by Indonesia since the invasion -- including some senior officials -- are forced to recite the official Indonesian view during visits by foreigners. These people would face harsh penalties, imprisonment, physical mistreatment or worse if they were to do otherwise. But their private comments often are quite the opposite from their public statements.

Thus, official Indonesian views can overwhelm a foreign visitor to East Timor.

Having said these things, allow me to respectfully state that a variety of unimpeachable sources in East Timor with whom I am in contact do not agree with the conclusions presented in your July 19 article. From detailed information I have received I can say that it is simply not accurate to state that "the countryside is largely peaceful", nor can it be said that "the pattern of violence may have changed over the last year." While it is said that "the number of political detainees has dropped sharply", all too often in the recent past this has meant that detainees are simply moved from one prison to another, less identifiable facility. Some prisoners have even been "temporarily released" for the duration of visits by foreigners!

Regarding the statement in the July 19 article that "for most (East) Timorese...life has begun to improve materially, I am compelled to say several things. First, one must substitute the word "some" for "most", and even then this is true only in a very limited sense. In fact, in certain areas of East Timor, closed to all outsiders (including the International Red Cross), there is great deprivation, even slow starvation. Second, thousands of military men, civil servants and others sent by Jakarta with their families are mixed in with the local population; their presence may help create misleading impressions for foreigners unfamiliar with East Timor. And while it may seem that marketplaces are well stocked, few local people can afford to buy much -- such markets exist almost solely to serve Indonesians who have migrated to East Timor.

Here I would comment on your August 30 article, which appeared to believe that East Timor's coffee and rice production is of local benefit. As has been known for several years, East Timor's coffee growing industry has been taken over by an Indonesian military trading company and provides much less income to East Timorese people than was the case under Portugal. As for rice, this crop mainly benefits the Indonesian government and settlers brought in by Jakarta.

As I have noted in a recent article in the Asian Wall Street Journal, which I enclose, many of Indonesia's expenditures in East Timor are related to military concerns -- roads for military operations, housing developments to control the movements of the population. Jakarta's "educational" programs are aimed mainly at eradicating Timorese languages and culture. Official Indonesian statements and figures on such matters are deceptive, to say the least. Yet your August 30 report appears to suggest that these expenditures make East Timor a privil--eged territory when compared with West Timor. I would say, in response, that Jakarta should take its money to West Timor and leave the people of East Timor to live in freedom by themselves.

And here I turn to a fundamental flaw in your two articles -- namely that there is no mention whatsoever of the word "freedom", which plainly does not exist in East Timor. Nor is there any mention of the rights of the people of East Timor, particularly not the internationally-recognized right of self-determination. Those who continue to resist the Indonesians are characterized as "bandits" (Would not Soviet Russia offer the same characterization for the resistance in Afghanistan?). There are no "economic causes" behind the guerilla fighting in East Timor, as your August 30 article states: the tragic conflict is over East Timor's right to nationhood, the dignity of its people and the right to live free of foreign oppression. Surely witnesses can be found in any situation of conflict to support or denounce a particular point of view, and atrocities are invariably committed on both sides of any conflict. But the

basic issue is that the conflict in East Timor stems from the denial of the rights of our people, no matter how Indonesia and its friends abroad may seek to hide this fact.

And it is with sadness that I note that your articles made no mention of the enormous human toll of the Indonesian occupation of our homeland -- well over 100,000 East Timorese have perished since the Indonesian invasion. For Indonesian officials to claim -- after its forces have unleashed such death and destruction -- that Jakarta's expenditures are meant to "overcome 400 years of Portuguese neglect" is cynical beyond belief.

Finally, anyone who is interested in the truth would observe that there are virtually no independent East Timorese voices represented in your articles. But material from Indonesian government sources and from diplomats (who appear to support the basic Indonesian position) is treated as unquestioned fact.

However, those in the East Timorese Church who openly oppose Jakarta are, to my astonishment, treated with disbelief, when they are mentioned at all.

I would close by offering the hope that fairness will eventually prevail, and that the truth may be heard.

Sincerely,

Martinho da Costa Lopes
Apostolic Administrator of East Timor, 1977-83

Copies to: Bishop James Malone, President, National Conference of Catholic Bishops
Cardinal John O'Connor of New York
Representative Tony Hall of Ohio
Senator David Durenberger of Minnesota